

VZCZCXRO2515
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHPC #0529/01 1421000
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 221000Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY LOME
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7076
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LOME 000529

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: TOGO: UNCOMPROMISING POSITIONS DURING THE NATIONAL
DIALOGUE?

REF: A. LOME 447
[B](#). LOME 452
[C](#). LOME 32

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Classified By: Poloff Rona Rathod for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary. Three weeks after the official opening of the Togolese national dialogue, discussions are moving along at a tortuous pace. In leading the proceedings, dialogue chair Yawovi Agboyibo of the opposition CAR party has been ponderous, as have been the agreed-to procedures. This week, the nine delegations concluded the initial discussion round, to be followed by individual sessions with the dialogue board to find consensus on the twelve points of discussion. Whether unresolved topics will be heard by a facilitator remains unsettled. Following a visit to Lome, Louis Michel's comments about the dialogue sparked some rancor among Togolese who believe that he has de-linked holding free and fair elections from the rest of the reforms Togo has pledged to make in order to resume receiving EU development assistance. Electoral reform being the most contentious subject of discussion, the delegates spent an entire week discussing it without coming up with very many concrete agreements. Since several parties are being too partisan in the negotiations, many issues are being tabled to be hashed out later. However, it seems likely that a transitional government will be put in place after the talks. End summary.

SLOW AND STEADY CAN WIN THE RACE... OR NEVER SEE THE FINISH

LINE

[1](#)2. (SBU) Three weeks after the official opening of the Togolese national dialogue (see ref A), discussions are moving along, albeit at a tortuous pace. After Prime Minister Edem Kodjo kicked off the first session of the dialogue, and after a prolonged and acrimonious dispute about voting procedures to be used during the process, the nine delegations, selected CAR (Action Committee for Revival) president Yawovi Agboyibo to chair the proceedings. The participants also voted in Kissem Walla-Tchangai, former member of the electoral commission who announced last year's presidential election results and current member of a women's NGO close to the ruling party, as vice-chair and Gilbert Bawara, Minister Delegate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs charged with cooperation, as rapporteur. As chairman of the dialogue, Agboyibo has been very ponderous, reporting to the

press issues addressed in the sessions in a lethargic, meandering manner, without providing much substance.

¶3. (C) The dialogue process has been moving sluggishly not only because of the languid Agboyibo, but also as a result of vague procedures. The opposition UFC (United Forces for Change), at the behest of its self-exiled president Gilchrist Olympio, threatened to leave its seat at the dialogue empty if the delegations finalized agreements by majority vote rather than consensus. In order to convey the seriousness of his threat, Olympio tasked Robert Dussey of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Togo with transmitting a message to Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe reiterating this position. Therefore, each of the twelve official topics of discussion must be addressed in two stages. (Note. Four more topics were added after ref B: 1) institutional reform outside of the election context, 2) financing of political parties, 3) the call to resume cooperation, and 4) putting in place a mechanism to follow the implementation of decisions made during the dialogue. End note.) In the first stage, each of the nine groups has the opportunity to express their opinions about the twelve points of discussion and then discuss them in a plenary session. In the second stage the participants will attempt to reach consensus on each subject.

¶4. (SBU) Mired in these equivocal procedures, the representatives at last brought stage one of the negotiations to a close on May 16. In a May 17 press conference, Agboyibo confirmed that the second stage of the talks had commenced and indicated that during the second stage, the dialogue board would meet with each party individually to prod them to make concessions on issues that could potentially derail the negotiations. Burkinabe president Blaise Campaore has also reportedly offered to meet the delegations individually in Ouagadougou to consult on their perceptions of what has so far taken place. The conclusions of the individual sessions will be compiled into a draft agreement, which the board will

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then pass to each delegation for their comments and amendments. They plan to reconvene in a plenary session on May 24 to formulate a definitive political agreement.

¶5. (U) Which prompts us to wonder about what will happen to polemical issues that do not find consensus during the national dialogue. The participants have not arrived at a final determination about whether to use the good offices of a facilitator to resolve disputed issues (see ref C). Despite this, the delegations seem to have a tacit understanding that a facilitator will assist them to work through unresolved topics.

EU COMMISSIONER'S VIEWPOINT SPARKS RANCOR

¶6. (U) Strenuous grumblings were heard around Lome after European Union (EU) Commissioner Louis Michel's May 4-5 trip to meet with participants of the national dialogue. Michel made comments suggesting that the issue of elections was the most important for the EU in order to resume bilateral assistance. Arranging free and fair national legislative elections is one of the outstanding obligations of the 22 commitments the Togolese government made to the EU. He hoped for a complete agreement on an electoral framework and an indicative date for national legislative elections for the EU to be able to move on making available 20 million euros of European Economic Development Funds. By putting priority on the elections, Michel is seen to have de-linked this issue from the rest of the commitments Togo made to the EU, thereby prompting some Togolese to accuse Michel of losing sight of the essential purpose of the dialogue: truth and reconciliation among Togolese.

¶7. (U) Others felt that what Michel said was exactly right and that malcontents are missing the nuance of his

statements. They have put forth the opinion that free and fair elections will demonstrate that Togo is on a positive trajectory toward real democratic systems and will calm the increasingly volatile population so that a new government can continue to implement the other commitments. This camp views a successful election as an immediate result and the other commitments as ongoing processes.

ELECTION CONTENTION

¶18. (U) The participants' handling of the election issue, however, may not bode well for restarting assistance. After a full week of talks, the delegates finally saw the conclusion of negotiations about this first, and most contentious, topic of focus. Despite wrapping up talks about elections at the end of last week, several issues key to putting the election process in motion remain unresolved. Although all parties have agreed that the government should undertake an electoral census, the modalities remain to be defined. Similarly, the representatives did agree that international civil and military observers would be welcome during the next election, but did not unanimously consent to local observers.

¶19. (U) More troublesome is the fact that no inroads have been made on defining the composition of the powerful electoral commission. The essential quandary hinges on whether to categorize opposition parties playing a role in the current government, namely the CPP (Panafrican Patriotic Convergence) party of the prime minister (who is no longer involved in the dialogue) and the foreign affairs minister's PDR (Party for Democracy and Revival), as truly opposition or as part of the ruling party. The ruling RPT (Rally of Togolese People) reportedly refuses to classify the two political factions as part of their own group and wants to label them opposition.

¶110. (U) Talks about electoral districting have also fallen flat, with the opposition demanding more seats in Lome than the RPT is willing to relinquish. The government is insisting on completing the general population consensus before even mentioning redistricting. The end result of this lack of consensus is that the provisional national legislative election date has been pushed back from November 2006 to early 2007. Notwithstanding these uncompromising positions, the delegates have found consensus on technical issues, such as distribution of voter cards and what fee to levy upon candidates.

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DITHERING LOVES COMPANY

¶11. (SBU) The prolonged sessions without consensus prompted Jean-Pierre Fabre, Secretary General of the UFC, to complain that the delegates are bracketing every issue, simply agreeing to disagree. Foreign Minister Zarifou Ayeva commented that the government had made a mistake in electing not to employ a facilitator and conducting the dialogue within Togo. The obduracy of the delegates has also triggered some behind-the-scenes nudging, with Michel telling Faure quietly that his RPT group needs to take a broader view of the talks and be more forthcoming with compromises. The EU observer to the dialogue (ECOWAS and Burkina Faso are also represented) also accused the GoT itself of being too partisan in its negotiations.

COMMENT

¶12. (C) While UFC party members charge other delegations of

being unyielding, they too are not willing to budge on many issues. Nevertheless, it is heartening to see the major Togolese opposition party playing a part in talks it has repeatedly threatened to boycott because of prior failed dialogues. Notwithstanding the resoluteness of some of the parties, they will in all likelihood appoint a transitional government following the conclusion of the talks. However, next steps remain as vague as ever with disagreement being the most common theme of this dialogue.

DIFFILY